

247hh- Discerning The Body For Uprooting Of Sensuality

By Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

(A Summarised Transcription of a Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talk)

The reason why a person's mind would still be dependent on the pleasure of the senses despite knowing how little satisfaction they provide or how much danger they entail, is fundamentally because they do not really know where the problem is. You can know that the pleasures that you get from the sense objects are not satisfactory but you still don't understand the extent of the sense objects, you don't understand the extent of the pleasure that you are chasing. In other words, when you think about the dissatisfactory nature of the sense objects, that is not entirely accurate because if it were, then you would understand the danger and lose desire towards it. The problem with still being attracted towards that which you know does not result in happiness but instead in doing you more harm than good, the problem of you still being addicted to the pleasures of the senses is that you don't see where that pleasure begins, you only see what you are used to seeing on the level of the sense objects but there is more to that picture that is left out because of which your addiction is not uprooted, and that which is left out is the relationship with you and your body.

When there is a sensual pull towards sense objects for pleasure, at the same time, your body and senses are there peripherally enduring as a basis from which you are pressured. The relationship, on that peripheral level, between you and that body that is pressuring you towards sense objects, that's what needs to be understood. The reason why that is so hard to understand is because the body as a unity of sense organs does not and cannot appear on the level of sense objects. Your dependence on the pleasures of the sense objects is determined by and dependent upon the pressure that your body exerts on your mind. It is a wild animal that you are tied to, it's inseparable from your mind, and it wants to go left and right and eat this and that, and it will pressure you until it gets what it wants.

It's not about removing the agreeable and enticing things from the world to be free, it's about taming that which pressures you because of which you are not free. That's why you are still attracted to sense objects despite knowing how little satisfaction sense objects provide. Your knowledge that "This is dissatisfactory" is limited and pertains only within the sense objects and you are failing to see the bigger picture of this whole underlying pressure of your own body and the pleasure that you depend on. You are failing to see the wild animal underneath. You don't see that as a problem, you only think that the sense objects that you become obsessed about, are the problem. No, that's pretty much the end result of the problem already being there and fully controlling you. That's why sense restraint - not engaging in these sense objects that are inciting of lust, etc, is the prerequisite which will help you to see the roots of the problem, which is the body, the senses, that are attracted to the pleasure that they are used to, to those unwholesome pleasures that you have been carelessly feeding them.

If you don't engage with the pleasures that they are used to, their dependence on that will cease because they haven't been engaging with it. If the animal is engaged in a perpetual wild behaviour it will become used to that and that's going to be its norm, but if the animal is not allowed to engage with these sense objects which are provocative of lust and aversion, it will calm down whether it wants to or not because things of the agitating nature are now things that the animal has not been engaging with. If you want to uproot the dependence on the pleasure of the sense objects, you have to uproot the dependence on the pleasure of this body, its agreeability, your assumption of ownership, and not seeing it peripherally as a thing which endures there on its own, with its own thirsts.

You need to disown the body but that can only be done on the level of that correct peripheral recognition of what the body is. It cannot be done on the level of observing the body with your senses because you are not observing the body, you are observing the sense objects which require the body, and even if you are super attentive to every sensation that occurs, that's all on the level of sense objects and that's why none of that which is underneath it, which is that necessary requirement for perceiving the sense object, none of that will be affected by that practise and by those efforts. In the same sense that an eye cannot see itself, for as long as you believe that you can, you will be engaged in an extremely futile attempt of trying to access that which is inaccessible, i.e. trying to access your sense organs on the level of sense objects, which is a contradiction in terms. You need to see/discern the body on the level of the senses, on the level of the framework of the world of the sense objects, and that will fully purify the relationship between you and the body that appears peripherally while you are experiencing sense objects.

For as long as you have sense objects, the body, the unity of the sense organs, is peripheral to that. It's always the background to the domain of the sense objects and that's where you need to discern it. It's not about examining the individual organs and looking at it with other sense organs, it's about understanding the six sense base, the body as that thing which is there that needs to be tamed on that level of the peripheral. Through not engaging with sense objects that are pulling you, that pressure that the body exerts over you will diminish and the clearer you will see it on that level which is revealed through sense restraint. The more you get used to it, the less pressure there will be, the body will be seen correctly and any possibility of pleasure to be accessed or experienced through that body will not be something that will interest your mind, because the mind would see the extent of the danger if it chooses to go in that direction.

So just to summarise, the first thing you want to do is, if you want to stop chasing the sense pleasures, you start practising mindfulness of the body correctly, not as an observational technique of watching sensations, but by seeing it peripherally as an enduring bag of skin which contains the

sense organs that are attracted to the various sense pleasures, that they get in their respective domains. You want to learn to discern the body as it is, as a thing in the world on the level of the peripheral, without trying to attend to it directly, which is impossible. You will get to see that body peripherally, if you have been practising sense restraint sufficiently, guarding of the sense doors, being moderate in eating, watchful and dwelling in solitude - because company and the world requires your mind to be on the level of sense objects, and if you have not been sufficiently withdrawn from that, then there is not enough space for you to step back and get to see this body as a thing that endures there in the world as a basis for all the sense object experiences. You will not be able to see the relationship between the two.

Now when you have been sufficiently withdrawn in this way, you can then disown the pressure and pull of those individual organs, you can see them as five individual animals, like [the simile](#) that the Buddha gave. You can see them as wild animals that need training. People who are not withdrawn from the sense objects, see 'the animals' only in abstraction, which means that they do not see them. They don't see their sense organ as an independent entity which pretty much has its own life, desires/needs, that they need to tame and control. So each time there is a pull from a sense object, then they are the ones that are pulled by sense objects, they don't see anything in between because those sense organs, those animals, do not appear on the level of sense objects that you are so used to looking at and measuring your existence by. That's why there is the encouragement for the practice of sense restraint and correct mindfulness, for discerning those peripheral signs and features of that body which exist on the level of 'around that which you are attending to', that's what the body is.

That's also what the Buddha meant when speaking about knowing the [body to the extent necessary for final knowledge](#). The measure of that extent is how familiar you are with the phenomenon of the body on the level of the peripheral, how steady your mind is in discerning the presence of the body for what it is on its own without trying to attend to it directly, without trying to make it a sense object. If you can discern that extent sufficiently then you will no longer be underlied by lust, craving and thirst of the individual senses.

By not discerning the senses and by being on the level of sense objects that's how you are underlied by all the asavas. They underlie you because you go over them, and then they direct and push you. So you want to develop your mind to the extent necessary where you are not [underlied by them](#), but when you underlie them, so to speak. Like in one sutta where it says that the arahants mind is not overwhelmed by things, by pressures, he is the one who [overwhelms them](#). That is what is meant by establishing the right order, seeing what comes first, seeing the body on the level of the peripheral, as that which is first and not losing that context, despite what happens with your individual attention. So whatever you are attending to, whatever pressure there is, desire for pleasure and so on, the order that is now determined by your knowledge, now does not change, you

still see that peripheral body as the basis for all of this that is happening, and all you need to do is protect that order so that there is no room to become underlied by lust, aversion, distraction, which is the perverted order.

Practice that sufficiently and lust, aversion, distraction will completely fade because they have not been maintained through the perversion of the order. That's why Ven. Ananda said that "Sensuality is a perversion of perception", i.e. putting the sense objects first and everything else measured through that as second, and not seeing the body peripherally, the necessary basis for sense organs as that which is first, structurally speaking. If you un-pervert that perception there is then no room for lust to breed and expand

"...I've got a burning desire for pleasure; My mind is on fire! Please, out of compassion, Gotama, tell me how to quench the flames?"

"Your mind is on fire because of a perversion of perception. Turn away from the feature of things that's attractive, provoking lust. See all sankharas as other/foreign, as suffering and not-self. Extinguish the great fire of lust, don't burn up again and again. With a mind unified and serene, reflect on the unattractive aspects of the body. With recollection of the body, be full of disenchantment. Contemplate the signless, give up the underlying tendency to conceit; and when you comprehend conceit, you will live at peace." - [Sn 8.4](#)